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# The Books of the Old Testament

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REV. JOHN SCRIMGER, D.D., M.A.  
Principal of Presbyterian College, Montreal,  
and Professor of Systematic Theology

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**REV. JOHN SCRIMGER, D.D., M.A.**

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# The Books of the Old Testament

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A WHOLE

#### Name

The name, Old Testament, is derived from 2 Cor. 3 : 14 : "For until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament." It means the collection of sacred and inspired books connected with the old covenant or Jewish dispensation. The collection is sometimes spoken of as the Old Testament Canon (or Rule), because it was regarded as an authoritative rule of faith and practice.

The forming of the collection as an authoritative Canon of Holy Scripture, has commonly been attributed to Ezra and his successors as heads of the Great Synagogue or Council of Seventy Elders. But very little is definitely known regarding that point.

#### Original Language

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, except a few chapters of the books of Ezra and Daniel which have come down to us in Chaldee, —a kindred language spoken by the Babylonians and by the Jews after the captivity.

At least a hundred years before the Christian era, however, the whole of the Old Testament had been

translated into Greek for the use of Jews living outside of Palestine. This Greek version, known as the Septuagint, is the one most frequently quoted by the writers of the New Testament, since they all wrote in Greek.

### Number of Books

As accepted by Jews and Protestants, the Old Testament collection consists of 39 books.

This number is easily remembered from the number of letters in the two words, O-l-d T-e-s-t-a-m-e-n-t, 3 and 9—39.

The Greek version contained a number of other books, usually called the Apocrypha. These were inserted also in the Latin version, known as the Vulgate, used by the Roman Catholic church. But the Apocrypha, though read for edification, were never regarded as authoritative either by the Jews or by Christians, until the time of the Council of Trent, held in the 16th century shortly after the Protestant Reformation. Since that time they have been accepted as authoritative by Roman Catholics.

### Jewish Division of the Books

The order of the books in the Hebrew Bible is somewhat different from that in the English version, which, like most modern versions, has largely followed the order found in the Septuagint.

The Jews divided the books into three groups :

(1) The Law, including the five books of Moses.

(2) The Prophets, including—(a) The earlier Historical books, namely, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. These are called Prophetical, probably because supposed to have been written by members of the prophetic order. (b) The Prophetical books proper,—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.

(3) The other Writings or Scriptures, including all the rest, namely, the poetical books, the book of



Daniel and the remaining histories,—Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles.

This group is also sometimes called the Psalms (Luke 24 : 44) because the book of Psalms was usually placed first in the group.

Within the two latter groups,—the Prophets and the Scriptures, the order in which the several books were placed sometimes varied, but the double book of Chronicles was generally put last. Hence the saying of Christ (Matt. 23 : 35) about all “the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel to that of Zechariah, slain between the temple and the altar,” as mentioned in 2 Chron. 24 : 21, included the whole Old Testament from beginning to end.

### Modern Classification

For our purpose in studying the Old Testament a more useful classification, and one following our own familiar order, will be a division according to subject :

(1) The Pentateuch (the fivefold book) or Law, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

These five books bear especially on the period of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and on the organization of the people as a nation. The book of Joshua is sometimes associated with them as relating closely to the same period. The sixfold book is then called the Hexateuch.

(2) The Historical books, from Joshua to Esther inclusive, as they stand in the English Bible.

These books give us our chief information regarding the history of the Jews from the time of the occupation of the land of Caanan, to the time of Ezra, after the restoration from the Babylonian captivity—a period of about 1000 years. Some portions are given with a good deal of detail, such

as the early life of David and the time of Elijah. Other portions are fragmentary or sketched only in broad lines, such as the period of the Judges and the reigns of most of the kings.

(3) The Poetical or Devotional books, from Job to the Song of Solomon, also Lamentations.

Like everything else in the Old Testament, the poems are all religious in their subject and thought; but they are by no means all in the same class. They represent four different kinds of poetry. (a) The book of Job is a sort of drama with an approach to the Epic in form. The ancient Jews had no theatrical performances and therefore no real drama. (b) The Song of Solomon is a lyrical dialogue with two leading characters and a chorus. (c) The Psalms are religious songs of praise. (d) Proverbs and Ecclesiastes belong to a class known as Wisdom literature, made up mainly of sententious sayings and short essays on the wise or right conduct of life. Though usually called poetry, it is often hard to distinguish this form from prose.

Hebrew poetry in its form differs greatly from all that we are familiar with as poetry in modern languages. It has no rhyme or regular rhythm, so far as can be made out. For its form it depends mainly on the arrangement of the sentences or clauses in closely related couplets or triplets so that they balance one another. This arrangement is called parallelism. In elevation of sentiment, terseness of phrases, and felicity of figures, Hebrew poetry ranks with the highest in any literature.

In addition to the poetical books there are many poetical passages in the histories and in the prophetic books.

(4) The Prophetical books, from Isaiah to Malachi.

These are usually again subdivided into (a) The Major Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and

Daniel, and (b) The twelve Minor Prophets—Hosea, Joel, Amos, etc. These twelve were counted by the Jews as one book, but they do not belong to one age, and they are not arranged in chronological order.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE PENTATEUCH

#### Its General Contents

The Pentateuch gives a history of the world from the Creation down to the death of Moses with special reference to the Jewish people, so as to show its peculiar place among the nations. Inserted in this history and forming its chief feature is the law, civil and religious, which regulated the whole life of the Jewish nation. Hence the collection of these books was most commonly known as the Law.

This law is still acknowledged as binding in all its details by the Jews, though owing to circumstances they are no longer able to offer sacrifices at Jerusalem as prescribed.

In all their later history, at least, the law as given in the Pentateuch was regarded as fixed and unchangeable. It could be interpreted, but not amended, though the interpretation often amounted to a real amendment. The most important work of Jewish literature outside the Bible, namely, the Talmud, consists largely of the interpretations given by noted lawyers for the guidance of the judges and for the instruction of the people on points that are not clearly provided for in the code of the Pentateuch.

## Divisions

The Pentateuch is divided into five books,—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

These names are not found in the Hebrew, but are taken from the Septuagint Greek version. The Greek translators, however, probably found the fivefold division already in existence and only invented the names as labels for their contents.

## Contents of Genesis

Genesis (that is, Beginning) is the book of Origins, and is of the nature of an introduction to the history of the Jewish nation. It gives (a) the Origin of the world, (b) the origin of man, (c) the origin of sin, (d) the origin of separate languages and nations, (e) the origin of the people of Israel, (f) the origin of the twelve tribes.

All these matters are treated in such a way as to throw light on the religious history of mankind as a whole, and to bring out the special mission of Israel as God's peculiar people, chosen to receive a revelation of His will and to witness for Him among the nations of the earth. As might be expected, there are many great gaps in the history represented only by a few names, and the chronology of the whole period is still very uncertain. Ussher's dates which have long appeared in many English Bibles are now considered by most authorities as far too short for all the earlier parts.

## Contents of Exodus

Exodus (that is, Departure) gives an account of the departure of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, also of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, and of the setting up of the first tabernacle or tent for public worship.

## Contents of Leviticus

Leviticus (that is, belonging to Levi) gives the details of the ceremonial for the worship in the tabernacle and directions for the observances of the great national festivals.

## Contents of Numbers

Numbers continues the history of the experiences of Israel in the wilderness on the way to the land of Canaan, and embodies further fragments of legislation on a variety of matters both civil and religious.

## Contents of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy contains a series of four addresses or sermons, all attributed to Moses, in which are rehearsed the main features of the Law (hence the name, meaning the second law). Frequent appeals are made for a hearty observance of the Law. A postscript gives an account of Moses' death.

## Aim of the Pentateuch

The aim or purpose of the Pentateuch is fourfold:

- (1) To give a basis in the story of Creation for the worship of one God only as the religion of Israel.
- (2) To supply a motive for strictly adhering to that worship in the story of this God's dealings with His chosen people, and especially in delivering them from Egyptian bondage.
- (3) To regulate the religious services and festivals.
- (4) To furnish a book of reference for the law in the administration of justice.

## Origin

The origin of the Pentateuch is a point much in dispute. Until recently it was all attributed to Moses both among Jews and Christians. But it is



now admitted on all hands that there has been some editing at a later date, and the question is as to how much has been added.

Many still claim that the amount of editing is only trivial,—a few notes to make the narrative plainer to readers of a later day. Others claim that, over and above these small matters, there are signs which indicate that the Pentateuch is a highly composite work by many writers, of whom Moses was probably one, and that it cannot have come into its present form before the time of Ezra, about a thousand years later than Moses. This view is based largely on two general contentions : (a) That the history all through is a combination of two documents, or rather of two series of documents, dovetailed into each other and still distinguishable by various marks, such as the style, type of thought, and the use of two different names for God. In many cases the narrative is plainly double, as in the stories of creation and the Deluge. (b) That the legislation is not a unit or the product of one age, but that there are at least three different codes which can be distinguished, more or less parallel to each other, but not always agreeing in details. The foundation is regarded as Mosaic, but most of the detailed legislation is the product of later ages, and is simply referred back to Moses by a formal phrase as the source of all legal authority.

### Value

The chief value of the Pentateuch is not scientific or even historical, but religious and moral. The history is given mainly for the sake of its lessons and not for its own sake.

Whoever wrote the Pentateuch, he must have drawn a large amount of his materials from earlier sources, written or traditional. It must be remem-

bered that even Moses was about as far removed from Adam and the antediluvian patriarchs as we are from Abraham.

The great religious lessons taught are :

(1) That there is only one true God whom we should worship and serve.

(2) That man is sinful and needs redemption. Hence the sacrifices.

(3) That God is gracious and ready to forgive the penitent.

The great moral lessons are those contained in the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai (Exod. 20 : 1-17). It gives also the twofold law of love emphasized by Christ (Deut. 6 : 5; Lev. 19 : 18).

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

#### I. JOSHUA

#### Contents

The book of Joshua gives an account of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, and narrates the leading events down to the time of Joshua's death. It gives, also, in full detail, the geographical boundaries of the districts allotted to the various tribes.

#### Object

The object of the book is twofold : (a) national,—to stir up the national spirit by the story of past victories; (b) religious,—to strengthen the people's devotion to Jehovah by showing how they had been enabled to overcome their enemies through divine help rather than through their own prowess. (Compare Ps. 44 : 1-8).

## Authorship

The author is wholly unknown. Jewish tradition ascribes it to Joshua himself. But this is altogether improbable, as events are referred to which occurred after Joshua's death.

Even as to the time of its composition, there is the same difference of opinion as there is regarding that of the Pentateuch, and the discussion turns upon much the same points. Those who accept the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch usually take the book of Joshua as being contemporary or nearly so, with Joshua's time. Those who make the Pentateuch a comparatively late composition would bring Joshua down to a correspondingly late date, as being virtually a continuation of the Pentateuch.

## II. JUDGES

### Contents

The book of Judges gives the only history which has survived of the period between the time of Joshua and that of Samuel, covering about 400 years, during which the people continued to be governed by judges or popular leaders, like Moses and Joshua, providentially raised up from time to time as they were needed to deliver them from their enemies and to complete the conquest of Canaan.

The history given in this book is by no means complete or even continuous, but is mainly made up of a series of striking episodes, such as are most likely to have been handed down in song or story from one generation to another; for example, Deborah's victory over Sisera, Gideon's victory over the Midianites with 300 men, Samson's prodigies of strength, etc. For the most part these episodes seem to be given in chronological order, except the two at the end,—narrating the migration of the Danites, and the extermination of the Ben-

jamites. These are clearly taken from a different source and probably added later.

### Purpose

The history is given not for its own sake, but with a manifest purpose—to show the connection between the religion of a nation and its prosperity. (See chs. 2 : 11-14; 3 : 7, 8; 4 : 1-3; etc.) This principle was one of the fundamental axioms of the prophetic order and is the key to much of their teaching.

### Authorship

The book tells us nothing about its authorship. Jewish tradition ascribes it to Samuel. It was almost certainly compiled by some member of the prophetic order as reorganized by Samuel.

## III. RUTH

### Contents

The book of Ruth gives an account of Ruth, a Moabitess, widow of an emigrant from Bethlehem in Judah, who returned with her widowed mother-in-law Naomi, to the former home of the latter, and married Boaz, a wealthy farmer there, from whom King David was descended.

The story is another episode of the period of the Judges, but of a different character from those in the preceding book, being a story of private life rather than of the national fortunes.

### Object

As to its purpose there are two quite distinct views : one, that it was written to reconcile the Moabites to the rule of David, by showing that he had Moabite blood in his veins; the other, that it was written after the captivity, as a protest against Ezra's effort to prevent all foreign intermarriages,

showing that even the royal family was sprung from such a union.

The difficulty with this latter view is to explain how the book on that supposition ever got into the Canon. Ezra's influence and Ezra's ideas controlled all the later period of Judaism, and his followers would never knowingly have acknowledged the authority of such an attack on his memory. On either view the authorship is wholly unknown.

#### IV. SAMUEL

##### Unity

The two books of Samuel were originally one. The division was probably made first in the Greek Septuagint version. The narrative is continuous.

##### Contents

This double book gives the history of about 100 years, beginning with the birth of Samuel in the time of Eli, and coming down to the time of David's reign. It covers thus the period of the consolidation of the nation as a kingdom. The leading characters are Samuel, Saul and David.

The chief agent in bringing about the consolidation is Samuel, who revives the national religion as the best means of reviving the national life, and who guides the nation in the choice of its first two kings, while he himself retires from the foremost place and occupies himself during his later years in organizing the prophets as a teaching or preaching order. By far the greater portion of the narrative, however, is taken up with the story of David's life. This is given with much picturesque detail, especially the years before he came to the throne.

##### Object

The main object of the history seems to be to strengthen the hold of the house of David on the



nation. Not only is David the hero, but in 2 Sam. 7 : 12-16 we have Nathan's famous prediction as to the perpetuity of David's family on the throne of Israel.

The book was evidently written by some one who was most friendly to David and who was anxious to represent him as the one chosen of God to rule over his people. David is not indeed represented as perfect, but his character is at great length contrasted with that of Saul, and his heroic generosity is held up for admiration. Prominence is given also to the fact that he was formally anointed by Samuel as king in Saul's place.

### Authorship

The books make no statement as to their author. But in 1 Chron. 20 : 29, 30, reference is made to a history of David written by Samuel, Nathan and Gad, the three heads of the prophetic order in David's time. If this is not the book referred to, it is probably one of the sources from which the materials of our books were drawn.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE HISTORICAL BOOKS (Continued)

#### V. KINGS AND CHRONICLES

### Their Likeness

These books may be most conveniently taken together, for they are alike :

(a) In being both double books now, though originally single. The division as in the case of Samuel was probably first made in the Septuagint Greek version.

(b) In being both historical.

(c) In giving us the history of about the same period. From Solomon to the captivity of Judah the two run parallel to each other, covering about 400 years.

(d) In having many passages that closely resemble each other.

(e) In being both of unknown authorship.

### Their Differences

They differ :

(a) In that Chronicles gives also an account of David's reign, thus being parallel to the Second Book of Samuel as well as to Kings.

(b) In that Chronicles, in addition to the history of the period from David to the captivity, gives genealogical tables running back to the Creation of man and down to a time somewhat later than the return from the captivity.

(c) In that Chronicles contains some historical information not found in Samuel or Kings.

This additional information largely pertains to the organization of the army, to arrangements for national defence, and for the ordering of the temple worship. The writer of Chronicles apparently had access to some old official records not used by the earlier compilers of Samuel and Kings.

(d) On the other hand Chronicles omits many things referred to in Samuel and Kings.

The most striking of these omissions is the whole history of the northern kingdom of Israel, which in Kings is given even more fully than that of Judah.

(e) There is a wide difference in the time of writing,—probably two or three hundred years.

Kings may have been written in the earlier part of the Babylonian captivity, when the memory of both kingdoms was still comparatively fresh. Chronicles must have been written some two or three

hundred years later, as shown by the genealogical tables which it contains. At that time all interest in the northern kingdom had passed away.

(f) There is also a difference in the standpoint of the writers, one being evidently a prophet and the other a priest.

The author of Kings writes as a prophet, enforcing the great prophetic principle that the national prosperity depended on the fidelity of the people to their covenant with God. The author of Chronicles writes as a priest who is interested in matters pertaining to the temple and its worship. The name of Jeremiah is traditionally connected with the authorship of Kings and that of Ezra with Chronicles. But the most that can be said is that the books proceeded from the schools of thought to which these great leaders belonged.

## VI. EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

### Unity

These two books though known by different names were originally one. They are really a continuation of the book of Chronicles and may have been compiled by the same author. In any case they proceed from the same circle as Chronicles and show many of the same characteristics.

### Contents

The history covers a period of about 100 years, from the return out of Babylon to the building of the walls of Jerusalem, but with considerable gaps about which nothing is told. The two leading characters are Ezra and Nehemiah.

The incidents related fall into three groups : (1) those connected with the first return and the rebuilding of the temple; (2) those connected with the first visit of Ezra to Jerusalem 57 years later, and with his somewhat rigid enforcement of the law;

(3) those connected with the visit of Nehemiah and with his measures for rebuilding the walls, gates, and fortifications of the city.

### Object

The object of this history is to show the importance of the Jewish ritual worship and to encourage a close adherence to the ceremonial law.

## VII. ESTHER

### Contents

This book recounts a striking interposition of divine providence for the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies through the instrumentality of Esther, a Jewess who becomes queen of Persia. In memory of the deliverance, the feast of Purim was established, which is still observed among the Jews with great enthusiasm. The book is remarkable in that it nowhere mentions the name of God, though it is deeply religious in its tone and spirit.

The events of the book are put in the reign of Ahasuerus, king of Persia, who is to be identified with the famous Xerxes that sought to conquer Greece and was so signally defeated at the naval battle of Salamis. His prime minister, Haman, lays a plan for the massacre of the Jews throughout the empire to avenge the supposed insolence of Mordecai, the queen's uncle. When the queen learns of the scheme, she skilfully and successfully intervenes on behalf of her fellowcountrymen. Haman is deposed and hanged, while Mordecai is raised to fill his place and the Jews are authorized to defend themselves against their assailants.

### Object

The main object of the book seems to be to explain the origin of the feast of Purim among the Jews of

the captivity and perhaps to commend the observance of it to the restored Jews of Palestine who would themselves have been in little danger from any violence and so less interested in the memorial institution.

### Historical Character

The historical character of the book has been questioned on various grounds, and in early times there was some doubt as to whether it should have been placed in the Canon of Holy Scripture at all. But though many of the incidents are unusual, there seems to be no sufficient reason to doubt its substantial accuracy as to matters of fact. Most of the difficulties raised are imaginary and can be very reasonably explained.

### Authorship

The book says nothing as to its author and we have no certain information from any other source. The name of Ezra has been suggested. It would have furthered his aims in stimulating the national spirit among his fellow countrymen. It probably came from some one belonging to his school and in sympathy with his ideas.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE POETICAL BOOKS

#### I. JOB

### Literary Character

The book of Job is the first of the poetical books to be considered. (For the characteristics of Hebrew poetry see chap. 1.) The bulk of the book is



poetical in form, but two chapters at the beginning and one at the end, which tell the story of Job, are in prose. As a poem it takes its place beside the greatest works in all the world's literature for the strength of its thought and for the beauty of its figures of speech.

### Theme

Many subjects relating to human life and experience are touched upon incidentally, so that passages may be quoted from it bearing on a great variety of topics; but its main theme is the problem of the suffering of the righteous in this world under the government of a just God. It presents and discusses in one way or another practically all the theories by which such suffering may be explained.

### Contents

The discussion of this problem is not an abstract one, but deals with a concrete case, that of Job, who is a righteous man greatly afflicted but in the end greatly blessed. The discussion is in the form of a dialogue between him and his four friends who visit him in his trouble.

Job is represented as a godfearing chieftain of the desert, who, after suffering from repeated disasters by which he is stripped of his wealth and of his children, is finally afflicted with a loathsome and painful disease. Notwithstanding all this he retains his faith in God. In his distress, three of his friends come to visit him. To them he bewails his fate and curses the day of his birth. They attempt to vindicate God's dealing with him according to the prevailing view by insinuating that Job has been guilty of some great sin which has provoked the divine wrath. Job repudiates any such charge and refuses to accept their view, vehemently asserting

his own innocence. After the three have exhausted all their eloquence on Job in vain, Elihu is introduced, who, rebuking both Job and his friends, proposes another theory, that suffering is one of God's ways of speaking to a man for his good. God Himself then appears, but instead of solving the problem, He is represented simply as claiming sovereignty in His dealings with men and not bound to give account of Himself to any. The writer, however, has his own solution different from that of any of the speakers in the dialogue and which is suggested only in the prose introduction. This is that God permits Satan to afflict Job in order to prove the genuineness of Job's piety as against the cynical accusation of Satan that this piety was all a matter of self-interest and would disappear under adversity. After the vindication is over, Job is represented as being abundantly blessed and prospered even more than before. Incidentally his spiritual life is also deepened by his clearer knowledge of God Himself (ch. 42 : 1-6).

### Structure

The arrangement of the poem is regular and even somewhat artificial. The speakers in the dialogue are introduced in regular order three times in succession and never appear out of their turn. In a sense the poem may be called dramatic, but there is no plot and no development of action as in the true drama.

### Object

The object of the poem seems plainly to be that of shedding some light on a problem which has always been perplexing to the human mind. This problem of suffering must have been doubly mysterious in Old Testament times, when they hardly seem to have

taken into account at all the future life and the compensation that might come there in the blessedness of the righteous, whatever their lot might be in this world. It will be observed that Job is represented as getting his reward here rather than hereafter. But experience shows that the suffering righteous do not always receive any such worldly compensation. Similar problems are suggested in many of the psalms which show how sorely the faith of the pious in Israel was often tried. The solution offered was never more than a partial one until Christ came, who "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

### Historical Character

The historical character of this book has been much discussed. But the question is one of no great importance, and a decision either one way or the other would not affect the permanent value of the book. At any rate, there seems to be no need to insist on the literal truthfulness of the story in all its details. The dialogue is certainly the poet's own invention, for no human beings could maintain a conversation on the literary level of these speeches. And an ancient poet was as free as any modern one would be, to invent his characters or idealize them if he chose to do so. Jesus Christ Himself certainly did it in His parables. But it is most probable that the writer of this book laid hold on some well known story of a real person already current among the people as suitable for his purpose, making only such changes as would not grate on the popular mind. Nearly all ancient fiction in every language started from such a basis of fact. Ezekiel (ch. 14 : 14) refers to Job along with Noah and Daniel as if they were all real persons, but without making any allusion to Job's experiences as given in this book.

### Authorship and Date

The authorship of the poem is wholly unknown, and even the date of its composition is very uncertain. Some would place it very early, at or before the time of Moses; others bring it down to a very late date in the history of the nation, after the captivity. Perhaps the latter view has most to commend it. The problem which it discusses—the suffering of the righteous—is as old as the human race, but such elaborate attempts at its solution as are here offered are likely to come late rather than early. And perhaps the problem itself would be all the more keenly felt because of the affliction which had overtaken the chosen people of God in the captivity; while the writer's solution was one which was really more fitted to bring comfort to the nation as such than to the individual, holding out as it did the prospect of ultimate prosperity, in which they all were disposed to believe. It makes little difference, however, to our interest in the book when or by whom it was written. In any case it is one of the grandest compositions in all literature.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE POETICAL BOOKS (Continued)

#### II. THE PSALMS

#### General Character

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 sacred songs or hymns for use in the temple and synagogue service of praise. As in all similar collections, many of the pieces are really prayers and a few of

them pious meditations. More than any other part of the Bible, they reveal the inward spiritual life of the people of God and express their holy aspirations. Hence they have been appreciated by the devout in every succeeding age of the church and have done much to sustain faith under trial and temptation.

## Themes

Each psalm is a complete whole and has a separate theme, but there are certain subjects which appear again and again in different forms. The most frequent of these subjects are : (1) praise of God's glory as seen in creation and providence; (2) praise of God's faithfulness to His covenant people; (3) praise of God's anointed king; (4) praise of God's law; (5) thanksgiving for national victory; (6) thanksgiving for personal deliverance from trouble; (7) confession of sin and prayer for pardon; (8) prayer for deliverance from persecution and denunciation of persecutors; (9) prayer for restoration from national disaster; (10) prayer for restoration to the privileges of God's house.

These themes are not always kept separate, but are frequently found combined in the same psalm. The transitions are often obscure and dictated by the feeling of the writer rather than by logical sequence. Sometimes the order of thought is regulated by the letters of the alphabet, with which the verses are made to begin in regular succession, forming an alphabetical acrostic. The most striking example of this is Psalm 119, but there are some eight other cases in which it occurs, where it is not apparent to the English reader.

## Arrangement

There is no fixed principle that can be discovered in the arrangement of the collection. They are not



grouped strictly according to subjects, nor according to authors, nor according to dates of composition. But as a general rule those at the beginning of the collection are earlier in time and more personal in character than those at the end, where the national idea is more prominent. The subjects are mixed somewhat indiscriminately, though a few groups may be detected in which the several compositions show a natural connection with each other. There is one considerable group known as the Songs of Degrees (Ps. 120-134) consisting of those supposed to be sung by the people on their annual pilgrimages to the feasts at Jerusalem, but the themes of these vary a good deal in character.

### Divisions

As is plainly seen in the English Revised Version, the collection is divided into five books or subordinate collections. The end of each is marked by a doxology which is appended to the last psalm of the particular book, but has no special connection with it. In the case of the last book the doxology is expanded into a whole psalm by itself.

The books end with Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106 and 150. The Jewish tradition is that this fivefold division was made so that the psalter might correspond to the five books of the Law of Moses. But it is more likely that it represents, mainly at least, successive stages in the growth of the psalter. At the end of the second book (Psalm 72) after the doxology there is a note stating that the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended, which indicates that at one time this was the end of the collection. The remaining portions must have been added later.

### Inscriptions

All but 34 of the psalms have inscriptions attached to them purporting to give information as to their

authorship or the circumstances out of which they arose, or directions as to their musical rendering. These inscriptions stand at the beginning of the several psalms to which they belong, though in a number of cases the musical term *Selah* is placed in the text of the psalm itself. These inscriptions, of course, form no part of the original composition, and their value is much disputed, as it is not known by whom they were inserted.

It is certain, however, that they are very old, for they are found in the Greek Septuagint version made before the Christian era, and they were then so old that the meaning of the musical terms was already lost. Instead of translating them, the makers of that version simply put them in as they found them. Most probably the inscriptions were attached to the psalms at the time when they were put into the collection and represent the current tradition of the time. As the date of their being placed in the collection was in some cases farther from the date of composition than in others, the value of the information they contain varies a good deal, and they cannot be accepted as final.

### Authorship

The Psalms are commonly spoken of as David's. But he certainly did not write them all. The inscriptions attribute 73 of them to David and 28 to others, while the rest are anonymous. David probably gave the impulse to this form of composition when he arranged for a musical service in connection with the tabernacle worship, and may have contributed a considerable number from his own pen. It would seem also as if in some cases the psalms as used for public worship were adapted from older compositions not written for this purpose, and some of these may be David's in that sense as well. But

it is clear from their contents that a good many of them were written after the captivity.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE POETICAL BOOKS (Continued)

#### III. PROVERBS

##### Contents

The book of Proverbs is a collection of short poems and still shorter detached sayings, commending wisdom, or advising as to the wise conduct of life. Beyond the general statement that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, there is almost nothing relating to religion as distinguished from morality. The moral reflections are keen and pointed, but there is no motive appealed to, save that of the worldly advantage to be gained by adhering to the right. There is nothing distinctively Jewish in the book, and so far as the contents go, they might belong to any nation whatever. The advice holds good for all countries and for all times.

##### Divisions

The collection as a whole is made up of at least eight minor collections or separate pieces, and the minor collections are not all quite of the same character. The titles or headings of these minor collections still stand in their place (see chs. 1: 1; 10: 1; 22: 17; 24: 23; 25: 1; 30: 1; 31: 1).

Only the parts between chs. 10 and 29 are, properly speaking, detached proverbs. The remaining portions are more or less continuous poems, though containing many short proverbial sentences that

may have originally stood alone. Though the theme is much the same all through, there is comparatively little repetition.

### Authorship

The book as a whole is popularly attributed to Solomon, but he cannot possibly have left it in its present form. The heading in ch. 25 : 1 states that the collection which follows was made by the men of Hezekiah at least 200 years after Solomon's death. Other portions are probably later still. Solomon was, however, regarded as the great coiner of proverbial sayings and gave the impulse to this style of composition. Only in that sense is this book his.

## IV. ECCLESIASTES

### Character and Contents

The book of Ecclesiastes is a sort of prose poem on the vanity of human life even in its most pleasing and successful forms. The reflections are put in the mouth of Solomon, who had been in a position to make trial of the best the world had to offer,—power, wealth, splendor, pleasure, wisdom. All are declared to be vanity. There is nothing worth striving for if this life alone is kept in view. The general tone of the book seems sceptical and despairing. But at the end it points its moral. The end of the whole matter is this, to fear God and keep His commandments, for there is a judgment coming when He will make the riddles of life plain (ch. 12 : 13, 14).

### Authorship

Though the words are put in the mouth of Solomon, this is only dramatically. Almost all scholars now agree that this is one of the latest books of the Old Testament. The author is unknown.

## V. SONG OF SOLOMON

**Contents**

The Song of Solomon is a poetical dialogue on love. The speakers in the dialogue are King Solomon and some woman called the Shulamite, who is either his wife or one whom he desires to make his wife. Occasionally the ladies of the royal palace appear as a sort of chorus, but it is only to ask some question or furnish a fresh starting point for the two leading speakers.

**Purpose**

The purpose or object of the book has given rise to wide difference of opinion. But the view which now prevails with most scholars is that the poem sets forth the fidelity of a humble maiden to her shepherd lover, in spite of the flattering offers of King Solomon to make her one of his wives, and is intended to exalt the nobility of true affection as the basis of the marriage tie. This furnishes a worthy object for the composition and makes it supply a much needed lesson in almost every age.

The common view in the past has undoubtedly been that it is an allegory of the mutual love of God and His people. But there is nothing in the book to suggest any such intention, and it is impossible to carry out the allegory all through consistently.

**Authorship**

The title seems to suggest Solomon as the author, but there is no need to suppose that this means anything more than that Solomon is the principal speaker in the dialogue, which is therefore named after him. We speak of the play of Julius Cæsar without meaning that it was written by him, but only that he is the central figure. Some peculiarities in the language and the use of a few Persian

and Greek words have led most modern scholars to place the composition from six to seven hundred years after Solomon's time.

## VI. LAMENTATIONS

### Character and Contents

The book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems, all dirges or wails over the destruction of Jerusalem and the desolate condition of the land.

Apart from the common subject, these poems have no necessary connection with one another and each is complete in itself. But they conform to one general style of composition. The parallelism is a little peculiar, such as is found only in such dirges. Four out of the five pieces are alphabetic acrostics. The fifth, though not an acrostic, has a verse for each letter of the alphabet.

### Authorship

The Septuagint Greek version, which was made before the Christian era, attributes the authorship of all the pieces to Jeremiah, and this tradition has found a place in most modern versions of the Old Testament. But the Hebrew original makes no such claim and most modern scholars regard it as at least doubtful. It is not even certain that all the pieces were written by the same author. They must have been written, however, at no long time after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS

## General Character

The Prophetical books are mostly collections of briefly reported addresses spoken to the people of Israel and Judah by prophets who spoke in God's name. They contain some predictions of the future, but their most important feature is the revelation they give as to God's character and will. The prophets were mainly preachers of righteousness.

## The Prophetic Order

The prophets whose writings have come down to us belonged to a numerous order of religious teachers which flourished through many centuries and filled a most important place in the history of the nation. Their numbers varied greatly at different times according to the spiritual state of the people. So also their character. There were many false prophets as well as true ones. Most of them disappeared and left no record behind. Notices of a goodly number are preserved in the historical books.

The prophets differed from the priests, who were also religious teachers, (1) in not being hereditary, but taken from all the tribes indiscriminately : a few, such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, belonged to priestly families; (2) in not being supported by tithes but by the free-will offerings of the people; (3) in that their teaching was moral and spiritual rather than ritual or ceremonial, in which matters the priests were naturally more interested.

## Number and Order of Books

The prophetical books which have come down to us are 16 in number. In our Bibles they are arranged mainly by their length, the longer ones being

placed first without much regard to date. It will be more helpful to take them as nearly as possible in chronological order, and to group them according to the time or place of their work.

## I. JONAH

### Jonah's Life and Times

A prophet of this name is mentioned in 2 Kings 14 : 25 as prophesying in the reign of Jeroboam II., king of Israel, and assuring him of the recovery of territory that had been lost by his predecessors. But nothing is said of any mission to Nineveh.

### Contents of the Book

This book gives an account of a mission to Nineveh to warn it of coming judgment. Jonah at first refused to go and fled to sea, but, in a storm, was thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish. Three days after he was cast up on shore and then obeyed the Lord's command. The people of Nineveh heeded his warning of anger and averted the judgment by a public fast, somewhat to the disappointment of the prophet, who wished rather that his prediction might be fulfilled.

### Historical Character

The book has generally been taken as history both among Jews and Christians. Christ refers to it as though it was so understood in His time (Matt. 12 : 40, 41). Many, however, now take it as an allegory or parable. In this latter view Jonah is regarded as the embodiment of Israel, unfaithful to its mission, swallowed up by heathenism at the captivity, but restored that it might fulfil its purpose in instructing the heathen world as to the true God.

## Authorship and Date

Jonah is nowhere said to be the author of the book and he is everywhere spoken of in the third person. No reference is made to the actual destruction of Nineveh, which finally took place about a hundred years after Jonah's time. Hence some would put its composition before that event. Others, however, put it some hundreds of years later, when Nineveh had been so long in ruins that there was no need to mention the fact.

## II. AMOS

### Life and Times

Amos also lived in the reign of Jeroboam II., king of Israel. He was a native of Tekoa near Bethlehem, and by occupation was a shepherd or a vine-dresser, who had not been known as a prophet, but felt the call of God within him. Though a native of the Southern kingdom, his message was directed specially against the sins of the Northern kingdom. His discourses were delivered at Bethel, where the kings of Israel had set up a calf to worship as representing Jehovah. This was only some thirty miles from his own home. His message was not received in good part and he was driven away from Bethel by violence.

### Contents of His Book

He denounces Israel for the sins of luxury, self-indulgence, pride, and oppression of the poor, in which they have continued, notwithstanding repeated judgments. He warns them that unless they repent they will be carried into captivity, as well as all the people about them. As over against this dark prospect, the book ends with a picture of the glorious Messianic age, when judgment had accomplished its purpose.

## Style of Amos

Though Amos was of humble origin, his style is highly poetical and full of figures. He had an eye for the facts of nature more than any other Old Testament writer.

## Authorship

It is generally admitted that Amos must have written down these reports of his own discourses after being expelled from Bethel, probably as a protest against the treatment he had received and an appeal to the future. He is considered to be the first of the prophets to commit his message to writing.

### III. HOSEA

## Life and Times

Hosea was the younger contemporary of Amos and also testified against the unfaithfulness of Israel. But unlike Amos, he himself belonged to the Northern kingdom. His age was a lawless one. At least two out of the four kings who reigned during his career were assassinated, and the body politic was in the worst possible condition. Hosea saw that the judgment must be nigh at hand. In fact the destruction of the Northern kingdom by Assyria came within a few years after Hosea's death.

## His Message

Though Hosea denounces the idolatry and wickedness of the nation, his chief message is that of the longsuffering of God and His undying love for His own chosen people. He presents this thought as an encouragement to repentance.

The prophet was helped to a better understanding of God's rich love by his own unhappy family experience. His wife proved unfaithful to him, yet he found he loved her still. When she deserted him

and then was cast off by her paramour, he bought her back as a slave and restored her to his own house. God would do the same for unfaithful Israel. Many have taken this experience as only imaginary, like some of the symbolical acts performed by other prophets. But it seems to have been all too horribly real.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS (Continued)

#### IV. ISAIAH AND MICAH

#### History of their Times

Isaiah and Micah were contemporary prophets who are said to have prophesied in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. They seem to have been active mostly in the two latter reigns. The period was one full of great changes and many anxieties in the history of the nation. The two great powers of the time were Assyria and Egypt, one on either side. Between them the two little Jewish kingdoms were being slowly ground to powder. During the lifetime of these two prophets, Samaria was captured and its people carried into exile by Assyria. Judah narrowly escaped a like fate.

There were at least two great crises in Judah during this period, when Jerusalem was in danger of siege and capture. One was in the reign of Ahaz, when the kings of Syria and Israel combined to force Judah into a league against Assyria. The allied kings, after defeating Ahaz in the open country, were about to invest the city, but Ahaz appealed to Assyria for help, against the advice of Isaiah, and obtained deliverance but at heavy cost.

The other crisis was in the reign of Hezekiah. He had made common cause with Egypt against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and the surrender of Jerusalem was demanded by his general. On Isaiah's assurance of deliverance Hezekiah called upon Jehovah for help, and was saved without striking a blow. The Assyrian army was destroyed by some great disaster, probably the outbreak of plague.

### Lives of the Two Prophets

Isaiah was a resident of Jerusalem and probably of noble birth. He was married and had at least two children, who are given symbolic names in his writings as signs to his fellow-countrymen. He seems to have prophesied for about 50 years. Tradition represents him as having been martyred under Manasseh by being sawn asunder. (Compare Heb. 11 : 37.)

He came most prominently to the front on the occasion of the two great crises under Ahaz and Hezekiah. His advice on both occasions was the same,—that the king should trust in Jehovah and avoid any entangling foreign alliances.

Micah was his younger contemporary and must have lived through the same stirring events, but beyond predicting the capture of Samaria as a warning to Judah, he takes no notice of the political affairs of his time. His home was at Moresheth, which was probably a small town near Gath in the Philistine country. Micah was the first prophet to predict the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple for the sins of the nation. His predecessors seem to regard these as safe, whatever other judgments might overtake the people. Both Isaiah and Micah vigorously denounced the misgovernment of their time and the heartless oppression of the poor by the rich nobles.



## The Book of Isaiah

The book which bears Isaiah's name is a long one containing 66 chapters. It is not a continuous composition or even a collection made at one time, but rather a collection of several smaller groups of discourses made at different times and relating to different situations. These minor collections are made on various principles. Sometimes they represent discourses relating to the same occasion, sometimes discourses on different occasions but on the same or similar objects. In a number of cases the occasions of the discourses are indicated. More frequently these have to be inferred from the contents of the discourses. One section in the middle of the book is entirely historical (chs. 36-39).

The book divides into two main parts at the end of chap. 39. The first part contains groups of discourses relating mainly to events in Isaiah's lifetime and foretells the captivity. The second part relates to events 150 years later and foretells the restoration.

## Authorship of Isaiah

It is not certain that any portion of the book of Isaiah was written by the prophet in the form in which we have it. The book seems to be Isaiah's only in the sense in which David is the author of the Psalms and Solomon the author of Proverbs. The latter portion of the book, which is anonymous in the text, is now commonly attributed to an unknown prophet who lived during the captivity and encouraged his fellow-countrymen with the hope of an early return to their own land. He refers by name to Cyrus, the ruler who was to restore them, as if he were already a well known personage who had begun his career of conquest (chs. 44 : 28; 45 : 1). At least some of the collections in the first part of the book seem to have been made up of notes of

discourses taken by disciples of Isaiah (ch. 8 : 16). It is quite possible that none of these were published until after his death.

A detailed analysis of the contents cannot be given here. Some of its leading ideas are the following : (1) The holiness of God. This was impressed upon the prophet by a vision at the very opening of his ministry (ch. 6). Hence sacrifice without righteousness is vain. (2) The certainty of judgment for oppression and wrongdoing on the part of the ruling classes. (3) The preservation of a remnant which should enjoy the divine favor. (4) The folly of trusting in any foreign power for safety : Jehovah alone is the Protector of His people. (5) The Messianic hope which seems ever on the point of being fulfilled. Owing to the full offers of forgiveness of sin to the penitent, Isaiah has often been called the Evangelical prophet.

### Book of Micah

The book which bears Micah's name is a short one of only seven chapters, but it represents a much larger number of discourses. It falls into two part : (1) Chs. 1-5, in which the main complaint is against the oppression of the poor by the ruling classes, who are bringing the land to certain ruin. He predicts the destruction of Samaria, which actually took place in his own lifetime. He predicts also the destruction of Jerusalem, but its subsequent restoration under the Messiah. (2) Chs. 6, 7, giving discourses delivered probably some years later, when corruption had spread to all the people. Judgment would come upon them, but after judgment God would again remember His covenant with Abraham and bless them.

The line of thought in Micah's discourses is often difficult to follow owing to the brevity of the reports.

But there are some striking passages which are among the brightest gems of the Old Testament. Such, for example, are the picture of Messiah's rule in ch. 4 : 1-5 (found also in Isaiah ch. 2 : 1-4), the summary of man's duty in ch. 5 : 6-8, the character of God in ch. 7 : 18-20.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS (Continued)

#### V. ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM, HABBAKUK

#### The History of Their Time

This group of prophets, who were nearly contemporary with each other, is separated from Isaiah and Micah by a gap of about sixty years. They belong to the last generation before the captivity of Judah, in the reigns of Josiah and his sons. It was a time of great change and national upheavals, full of danger and uncertainty, when it must have been hard for the wisest rulers to know what was best to do, and when the strongest faith was sorely tested. In the beginning of Josiah's reign Assyria was still the great world power which exacted tribute from all western Asia. About the middle of his reign, the whole empire was filled with alarm by an invasion of wild Scythians, who came down in vast hordes from northern Asia and ravaged its provinces as far as the very frontiers of Egypt, but being unable to capture any of the strongholds, soon returned to their own country and left no permanent trace of their presence. It must have been almost at this very time that the book of the Law was found in the temple, which startled Josiah with its threat of com-

ing judgment on the nation for the disregard of Jehovah's worship. The danger from the Scythian savages was so near at hand that this led to a spasmodic effort after reform. Whatever the cause, Judah suffered less than her neighbours from this invasion, and when the danger was over their religious zeal flagged. The power of Assyria, however, was shaken by the widespread devastation of her provinces and she proved quite unable to recover herself. Twenty years later the Medes and Babylonians rose in rebellion, besieged Nineveh, took it and completely destroyed it. Almost at the same time Egypt pressed in on the southwest and captured all the provinces as far as the Euphrates. These provinces, hoping for independence through the weakness of Assyria, very naturally resisted. In a battle at Megiddo, Josiah was slain, a disaster which filled Jerusalem with great sorrow (2 Kings 23 : 29, 30). This conquest and the fall of Nineveh, brought Babylon and Egypt face to face in a contest for supremacy, and the conflict was naturally over these provinces on the Mediterranean which lay between the two great rivals. For a time they seemed evenly matched. First one triumphed, then the other. Judah was oppressed by each in turn, and when oppressed by one not unnaturally turned to the other for relief, so gaining a character for fickleness and perfidy that furnished excuse for severer measures still, as had been the case with Samaria more than a century before. As a punishment for one of its leanings to Egypt, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar carried away a large part of the ruling classes into captivity to Babylon, and when this lesson proved insufficient, a few years later he laid the city and its temple in ruins, slaughtering great numbers of its people and leading the remnant into exile beyond the Euphrates.

## Zephaniah and His Prophecy

Zephaniah is represented as a descendant of King Hezekiah, and so was nearly related to the royal family. His chief message was a warning of the near approach of the day of the Lord for judgment, which should bring desolation on Judah and all the nations round about, unless they repented.

Though not clearly mentioned, it is supposed that the danger he has specially in his eye is that arising from the great Scythian invasion which had already begun. His appeal to repentance, coming as it did at the same time as the discovery of the book of the Law in the temple, produced a marked outward result in the reform of public worship.

At the close of the book is another later message assuring the nation of restoration from captivity and promising rich blessing from the Lord. This may have been delivered after the first Babylonian invasion when they carried away the ruling classes into captivity, including such men as Ezekiel, Daniel and his companions, who afterwards became so distinguished. The prophet does not specify any time for the restoration, but it seems to have been taken for an assurance of early return, an error which was corrected by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

## Nahum and His Prophecy

Of Nahum personally nothing whatever is known beyond the fact that he is called an Elkoshite. But where this place Elkosh was, whether in Assyria, or in Galilee or in Judah, cannot be determined with any certainty.

His one theme is the coming destruction of Nineveh, which he describes in the most graphic manner, as if he already saw it being accomplished, with all the details that would naturally accompany it. The Lord had used Nineveh as His rod to chastise

His own people, but it had done this with hideous and needless cruelty. And now he will avenge all these cruelties with an awful destruction. We cannot be certain whether this prophecy was uttered at the time when Nineveh was threatened on account of the Scythian invasion, but escaped, or when it was taken by the Medes and Babylonians some years later. If on the latter occasion, it was most signally fulfilled, for the city was laid in ruins and never rebuilt. So complete was the destruction, that the very site was unknown until revealed by excavations made about sixty years ago.

### **Habakkuk and His Prophecy**

Habakkuk's prophecy falls a few years after Nineveh had fallen and the Chaldeans or Babylonians had begun their career of conquest. Josiah's reform had wrought little permanent improvement in the condition of the nation. Habakkuk denounces the wrong doing and the idolatry of the people, for which God would bring upon them the Chaldeans as the instrument of judgment. The Chaldeans were, however, warned that they in their turn would be judged by God for their rapacity and violence, just as the Assyrians had already suffered for a like reason.

The third and last chapter of this brief book is a hymn in praise of Jehovah's power to save, in which the wonderful things done for Israel of old are recalled as a reason for trusting in Him still. This hymn is entirely independent of the prophecy, but was probably intended to encourage the people to turn to the Lord in penitence and faith.

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## CHAPTER XI.

## THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS (Continued)

## VI. JEREMIAH AND OBADIAH

**Jeremiah's Life and Times**

Jeremiah was a priest of Anathoth, a village not far from Jerusalem. But it is as a prophet that he is best known to us, and there is no evidence that he ever officiated at the altar. He began to prophesy while still comparatively young, in the early part of Josiah's reign, about five years before the discovery of the Law in the temple, and almost at the same time as Zephaniah. His chief work, however, began some twenty-five years later, in the reign of Jehoiachin, Josiah's son, after the battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates, where the Egyptians were so signally defeated by the Babylonians in the struggle for the mastery over the now ruined Assyrian empire. He continued to prophesy until the destruction of Jerusalem, though at the risk of his life. During the siege he was arrested as a traitor to the national cause because he advised surrender, and was thrown into prison, where he would have perished but for the kindness of a slave. He survived the capture of the city, but was not carried away to Babylon. A little later, owing to the troubles in Judæa, he unwillingly accompanied a band of fugitives into Egypt and died there. For the public events of his time see the preceding chapter.

**His Message**

In the time of Josiah, Jeremiah joined Zephaniah in the appeal for repentance, calling upon the people to turn from their idolatries, and the rulers from their oppressions. He points out the danger of divine judgment falling upon them through "the

with some variations from the book of Kings and was evidently no part of the book originally (see chap. 51 : 64).

### Obadiah's Prophecy

Obadiah's prophecy consists of only one chapter and contains practically a single message, though representing perhaps several discourses. That message is a denunciation of Edom for its bitter hostility to Judah. The occasion is not clearly indicated and it is differently placed by various scholars. But the most probable view seems to be that it was owing to the active assistance given by the Edomites to the Chaldeans in the capture and overthrow of Jerusalem. There is a close parallel between part of Obadiah's prophecy and one on the same subject by Jeremiah (ch. 39). It is supposed that both may be quoting from some older prophecy, now lost. Similar denunciations of Edom for the same reason are found in Ezekiel, chs. 25 and 35, also in Psalm 137 : 7.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS (Continued)

#### VII. EZEKIEL AND DANIEL

#### Their Times

Ezekiel and Daniel may be taken together as contemporaries in the Babylonian exile, though otherwise widely separated and diverse in thought. Both were carried away into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar some years before the destruction of Jerusalem, though apparently not at the same time. They spent the remainder of their lives in Babylonia, where all their prophetic messages were delivered.

## Ezekiel's Life

Ezekiel was a priest who was taken into exile along with King Jehoiachim. He was settled with others by the river Chebar, one of the many canals near Babylon between the Tigris and the Euphrates. There the exiles formed a community by themselves and maintained some kind of religious fellowship with each other. Among these Ezekiel pursued his ministry for a period of twenty-two years, six of which were before the fall of Jerusalem and the final captivity of the nation. His life otherwise seems to have been uneventful.

## Ezekiel's Message

Ezekiel's prophetic work is sharply divided into two parts by the fall of Jerusalem. Previous to that event the burden of the message is the warning of the coming destruction of the city and temple for the continued wickedness of the people. After that point his great thought is that of the restoration of the people in the near future to their own land.

The first part of the ministry occupies twenty-four chapters or about one-half of the whole book. In these discourses, which were to the last degree unpopular among his fellowcountrymen, who were even then looking for a speedy return, he presents the thought of the approaching disaster in a great variety of forms. As the people were unwilling to listen to his words, many of the messages are in the form of allegorical actions which they could hardly fail to understand and which must have awakened attention even though treated with ridicule.

The fulfilment of these early prophecies must have greatly increased the respect with which his words were received. But henceforth his whole tone is changed from denunciation to reassurance and comfort (chs. 33-48). One of the most char-

acteristic discourses of this period is the well known one of the valley of dry bones that are made to live, in chap. 37. This series of prophecies closes with an ideal picture of the restored temple and city, the redistribution of the land among the tribes and a code regulating the revived sacrifices and festivals. It differs somewhat from the code of Leviticus and never really came into force, but served to keep hope alive in the hearts of the people. In the heart of the book (chs. 25-32) we have a group of prophecies against various foreign nations lying round about Judæa, which have rejoiced in the misfortunes of God's people and poured contempt on Jehovah's name, as if it were powerless to save. Each one of these in turn was to feel the heavy hand of the conqueror and suffer in like manner as Israel had done.

### Arrangement and Authorship

Unlike the book of Jeremiah, the prophecies of Ezekiel are arranged methodically and in chronological order, in three groups according to their subjects, as already indicated in the preceding paragraph. The arrangement is admitted on all hands to be by the prophet himself and not by any later editor.

### Daniel's Life

Daniel is said to have been carried away to Babylon as a boy, seven years earlier than Ezekiel, in the reign of Jehoiachim, that he might be trained for the public service at the Babylonian court. There he distinguished himself by his scrupulous fidelity to his ancestral faith and by his extraordinary capacity. He was brought to the notice of king Nebuchadnezzar by his success in recalling the details of a striking dream by which the king

was greatly impressed but which he had forgotten, and by giving an interpretation of it which at once commended itself by its simplicity and naturalness. He was promoted to high honours and power, which he continued to hold throughout the whole of Nebuchadnezzar's long and vigorous reign. After Nebuchadnezzar's death he sank into obscurity, but reappeared on the eve of the capture of Babylon by Cyrus. Under the Persian rule he again became a prominent figure. He was spared to see the restoration of his countrymen to their own land, but himself died at Babylon or, according to tradition, at Susa.

### Daniel's Visions

In addition to interpreting the king's dreams Daniel himself is represented as having visions at different times which reveal the future to him. The common thought in all these is the same—that of four successive world-kingdoms which should arise, to be followed by a divine kingdom that was to replace them and last forever.

The four world-kingdoms are not mentioned by name, and there is difference of opinion as to what ones are meant. The view long held was that they were (1) the Babylonian, (2) the Medo-Persian, (3) the Macedonian of Alexander the Great, (4) the Roman. The more recent view counts the Medo-Persian as two, and the fourth then becomes that of Alexander, which broke up immediately on his death. Two of its divisions which came into close contact with Judæa were Syria, with its capital at Antioch, under the Seleucidæ, and Egypt under the Ptolemies. The wars between these two are supposed to be referred to in chs. 10–12. In ch. 9 : 24–27 is a computation of time which is supposed by many to predict the date of the Messiah, but by

others to refer to the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, and to the deliverance under Judas Maccabæus about 160 B.C.

### Form of the Book

The book of Daniel belongs to a class of writings which became exceedingly popular among the Jews during the last two centuries of their history before the time of Christ, known as Apocalypses. In these the history of the past is usually set forth under the form of predictions by some noted worthy, which history then becomes a background for some ideal forecasting of the near future.

### Authorship

The authorship of this book is now much disputed. In former days it was generally attributed to Daniel himself, although the book nowhere makes such a claim, and there are strong reasons for doubting it. Many scholars now suppose it to have been written more than three hundred years after Daniel's time, about 167 B.C., and take it as being intended to support the faith of the Jews under the dreadful persecution they were then suffering from Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria. Down to the time of Antiochus, and especially about that time the history is given with a good deal of detail. Beyond that period it is general and ideal, never fulfilled in any literal sense.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS (Concluded)

#### VIII. HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

### Their Time

Haggai and Zechariah were contemporary prophets, who appeared in Jerusalem a few years after



the first return from captivity, and together urged the people to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5 : 1). Immediately on arrival at Jerusalem the people had repaired the old foundations and set up the altar, but, partly owing to the intrigues of the Samaritans at the Persian court and partly owing to their own preoccupation with other things, the work was stopped and nothing more was done for sixteen years. The two prophets stirred up the people to fresh activity, and within about four years the building was completed.

### Haggai's Life

Of Haggai's personal history we know nothing with any certainty. There is a Jewish tradition that he was one of those who had been carried away in the captivity, and so at this time would be a very old man, among those described in Ezra 3: 12, 13 as weeping at the remembrance of the first temple when the foundations of the second were laid.

### Haggai's Prophecies

Haggai's recorded prophecies are confined to the one subject and consist of four short discourses delivered within a few weeks of each other. His discourses are simple and easily understood. He goes straight to the point and there can be no mistaking his practical purpose.

### Zechariah's Prophecies

The collection of prophecies bearing Zechariah's name extends to fourteen chapters and divides into two quite distinct sections at the end of the eighth.

The first eight chapters contain discourses relating to the rebuilding of the temple, like those of Haggai. But while they begin at the same time as his, they extend over a period of two years, from

the second to the fourth year of Darius. They differ from Haggai's discourses also in being highly symbolical, consisting of a series of eight visions, the significant features of which are supposed to be pointed out to the prophet by an angel. They are all intended in different ways to encourage the people to action.

The remaining chapters (9-14) present many difficulties. They fall into two groups with separate headings (chs. 9 : 1; 12 : 1), but without any prophet's name. Hence many have supposed that they are really two short anonymous prophetic writings which have been erroneously attributed to Zechariah, simply because they follow his discourses in the collection of the Minor Prophets.

They bear no resemblance to Zechariah's visions in the first part of the book and seem to relate to an altogether different period of Jewish history. To complete the uncertainty, a quotation is made from one of these prophecies (ch. 11 : 12, 13) in Matt. 27 : 9, and is there attributed to Jeremiah. Some would therefore place one or both of these collections about the time of Jeremiah, before the captivity. Others would put them from one to two hundred years later than Zechariah's time. The historical illusions are confusing and the problem of their origin is as yet unsolved.

## IX. JOEL AND MALACHI

### Their Place

Joel and Malachi may be grouped together at the end, as being perhaps the two latest of the Old Testament prophets. But both are obscure figures whose personality and history are almost entirely unknown.

## Joel and His Prophecies

Of Joel we know only that he was the son of Pethuel, but he must have lived in Judæa. His prophecy was called forth by a plague of locusts accompanied by drought, which caused the severest distress throughout the land. In view of the situation the prophet exhorts the people to proclaim a fast and to supplicate the Lord for relief. He regards the prevailing calamity as an anticipation of the approaching "day of the Lord", which will be more dreadful to them still if they do not repent (ch. 1: 5). The people seem to have responded to the appeal, for the second half of the prophecy (from ch. 2: 18 to the end) describes Jehovah's gracious change of purpose and gives His answer to the people's prayer—a promise of abundant blessing both temporal and spiritual. When the day of the Lord comes it will have terror only for their enemies, who are to be all destroyed.

Some take the locusts to be a figurative description of a foreign invading army. But plagues of locusts were common enough and sometimes serious enough to furnish an occasion for such an appeal as the prophet here makes, and there seems no good reason why the description should not be taken literally.

Though the date of Joel is uncertain and widely different views have been held on that point, it is a matter of little consequence, as the appeal and the promise would both be equally appropriate at any such time of national calamity.

## Malachi's Prophecies

The prophecies of Malachi contain a denunciation of three prevailing evils, the degeneracy of the priests, intermarriage with foreigners, and the withholding

of tithes. He urges reform on two grounds, the Lord's love for them as a people, and the certainty of judgment for evil-doers at the coming "day of the Lord," however well they may fare in the meantime. He concludes with the promise of the return of Elijah before that day, to lead them to repentance in order that the curse on them may be averted.

### Malachi's Time

The book does not give us directly any information as to the time when he prophesied. But the evils of which he complains are those which prevailed in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It has been the general opinion of scholars that he belongs to that time and co-operated with them in their efforts to bring about a reform.

### Malachi's Name

There has been a good deal of doubt whether Malachi was the real name of the prophet. The name does not occur elsewhere and means simply "My messenger," in which sense it is used in this very book (ch. 3 : 10). Jewish tradition supposed him to have been really Ezra. But had Ezra been the author of the prophecy, it is difficult to think that the authorship would have been thus concealed. Even if Malachi is taken as the real name, however, it does not help us much, for we know nothing further about his history or his work.

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QUESTIONS

CHAPTER I.

- 1—Explain the origin of the name Old Testament.
- 2—State the languages in which the books of the Old Testament were written.
- 3—Give the number of books in the Old Testament.
- 4—Mention the Jewish divisions of the books, and give the reasons for their names.
- 5—Give a division of them according to their subject matter, naming all the books in each class.

CHAPTER II.

- 1—Describe the general contents of the Pentateuch.
- 2—Name the five books of the Pentateuch, and explain the meaning of the names and the special contents of each.
- 3—Explain the purposes served by the Pentateuch.
- 4—State the different views as to the authorship of the Pentateuch.
- 5—Give the most important religious truths taught in the Pentateuch.

CHAPTER III.

- 1—Describe the contents and object of the book of Joshua.

- 2—Describe the contents and object of the book of Judges.
- 3—Give the nature of the contents of the book of Ruth.
- 4—State the different views as to the object for which the book of Ruth was written.
- 5—Mention some of the leading characters of the double book of Samuel.
- 6—Explain the way in which the books of Samuel were written, and why.

## CHAPTER IV.

- 1—Mention the leading points in which the books of Kings and Chronicles are alike.
- 2—Mention the leading points in which they differ.
- 3—Indicate the period covered by the history in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and explain their main object.
- 4—Give the general character of the contents of the book of Esther, and explain its relation to the feast of Purim.

## CHAPTER V.

- 1—Explain the structure of the book of Job as a poem.
- 2—State the general subject of the book of Job, and explain how it is treated.



- 3—Compare its solution of the problem of suffering with that found in the New Testament.
- 4—Explain how far the character of Job is historical and how far the book is fictitious.
- 5—State different views as to when the book was composed.

CHAPTER VI.

- 1—Mention the leading themes treated in the Psalms.
- 2—Mention the old divisions found in the collection, and explain their origin.
- 3—Explain the nature of the inscriptions found prefixed to the Psalms, and estimate their value.
- 4—Explain why the Psalms are spoken of as David's.

CHAPTER VII.

- 1—Explain the character of the contents of the book of Proverbs.
- 2—Explain why the collection is attributed to Solomon.
- 3—Show why it could not have been written by Solomon in its present form.
- 4—Give the general subject of Ecclesiastes.
- 5—Explain the purpose of the Song of Solomon.
- 6—Explain the nature and subject of the poems in the book of Lamentations.

## CHAPTER VIII.

- 1—Give an account of the prophetic order, and show wherein they differed as religious teachers from the priests.
- 2—State what is known of Jonah apart from the book bearing his name.
- 3—Give different views as to the authorship and purpose of the book of Jonah.
- 4—Give an account of Amos and his prophetic work.
- 5—State the chief message of Hosea, and show how his own personal experience bore on it.

## CHAPTER IX.

- 1—Give an account of the times of Isaiah and Micah.
- 2—Compare the lives of the two prophets.
- 3—Explain the nature and origin of the book bearing Isaiah's name.
- 4—Mention some of the leading religious ideas of the book.
- 5—Distinguish the two parts of the book of Micah, and explain the reason of the difference.

## CHAPTER X.

- 1—Mention some of the leading historical events in the time of Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk.

- 2—Give an account of Zephaniah's prophecy.
- 3—Mention the subject of Nahum's prophecy and its probable occasion.
- 4—Give the leading points in Habakkuk's prophecy.
- 5—Explain the object of Habakkuk's hymn.

CHAPTER XI.

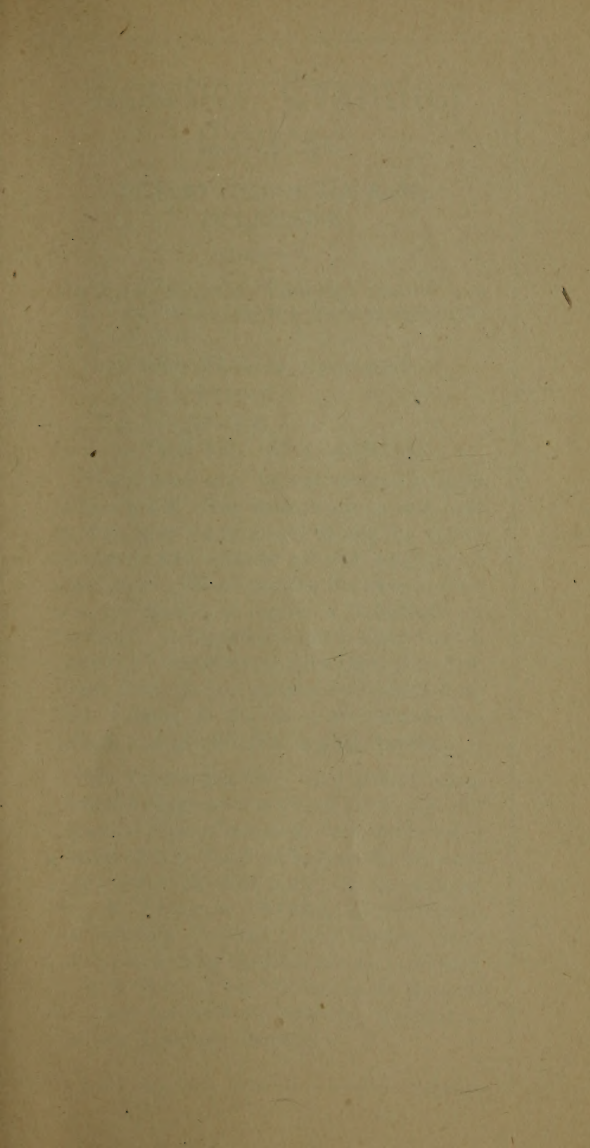
- 1—Give an account of the two chief periods of Jeremiah's prophetic work.
- 2—Explain the importance of the battle of Carchemish for the history of Judah.
- 3—Explain how Jeremiah's book was written, and describe its arrangement.
- 4—Give the subject of Obadiah's message and its probable occasion.

CHAPTER XII.

- 1—State when and where Ezekiel and Daniel lived, and compare their lives.
- 2—Explain the burden of Ezekiel's message before the destruction of Jerusalem and its nature after that event.
- 3—Explain the object of Ezekiel's code for the temple and its services.
- 4—Give the main thought in Daniel's visions.
- 5—Mention the different views as to the authorship and date of the book of Daniel.

## CHAPTER XIII.

- 1—Explain the main purpose of Haggai and Zechariah in their prophetic work.
  - 2—Compare the two prophets in the nature of their discourses.
  - 3—Give the purpose of Joel's prophecy, and explain the occasion that gave rise to it.
  - 4—Mention the evils denounced by Malachi, and explain when he probably prophesied.
  - 5—Give the meaning of the name Malachi, and show how it bears on his identity.
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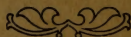
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